



# Societal Comparison and Social Change of the Family Division of Labour

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## Chapter 21

### **Societal comparison and social change of the family division of labour**

Marie-Agnès BARRERE-MAURISSON

#### **Abstract**

*In societal analysis, methodological problems are not simple questions of method but genuine theoretical issues.*

*This chapter takes the example of an international comparison of the division of paid and unpaid work in order to show how it was necessary to develop a specific methodology. Nevertheless, this new methodology has its roots in a pre-existing theoretical framework and is, in part, the product of a “specific” theory. Even more fundamentally, it leads to the elaboration of a “general” theory, in this case a theory of social change.*

*The paper seeks to examine the transition from a specific to a general theory by testing the validity of a paradigm: that of the various modes of societal regulation. This leads ultimately to what amounts to a “revisiting” or re-examination of societal analysis and the development of an approach of more general heuristic value.*

## **Introduction**

Recent years have seen a considerable expansion, a burgeoning even of comparative analyses. There is a great deal to be learnt from these studies, but they are not without epistemological problems.

There is indeed a shift of emphasis away from the “social”, where the point of reference is a particular society, towards the “societal”, where the point of reference is a society seen as an entity relative to other, comparable entities. Clearly this raises not only conceptual but also theoretical questions for the social sciences. What definitions of the nation-state and of supranational entities are being used? And, more importantly perhaps, how is the functioning of these entities being conceptualised in theoretical terms? In other words, is the construction of new categories in the sphere of *everyday reality* - made necessary, in this case, by the emergence of a transnational economic and institutional reality - not leading to a reconstruction of the categories of *knowledge*?

For this reason, our objective here is threefold. We will begin by demonstrating the specific use we have made of societal analysis as developed and implemented by the LEST school (Maurice, Sellier, Silvestre) in order to examine, from an already clearly marked-out position, *both* sides of the relationship between work and the family, i.e. production *and* reproduction.

Secondly, we will seek to establish what conditions are, in our view, required for such analysis. In the first instance, this is a methodological problem, since it is necessary to construct a specific methodology for societal comparison of the forms of relationship between work and the family. We will then seek to establish the principles on which a methodology for societal comparison can and must be based, and how this methodology can be accommodated within a specific theoretical framework.

Finally, we will examine what research opportunities are available and what projects are possible. This raises the question of the theoretical framework to be used (Schulteis, 1994, p. 101). More particularly, since different societies are being compared with each other, it is essential, before making any pronouncements on their possible divergence or convergence, to ascertain the theory of social change underlying any such pronouncements, since the question of a “general” theory, in this case of social change, will inevitably raise its head.

This approach will lead to what amounts to a “revisiting”, or re-examination of societal analysis. Ultimately, what we are going to investigate is the transition from a specific to a general theory by testing the validity of a paradigm, namely that of the various modes of *societal regulation*<sup>1</sup>. The fruit of our labours may well be a more global, more dynamic framework that will provide the basis for an approach to research of more general heuristic value.

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<sup>1</sup> J.D.Reynaud (1991) attempts to construct a sociology of societal regulation in a similar way, by showing how issues surrounding work can help to define a new form of action sociology.

## **1 - Societal comparison of the forms of the “family division of labour”**

### **1-1 “The family division of labour”<sup>2</sup>: the problematics of comparison**

#### *The work-family relationship: different forms in time and in space*

The principles animating the relationship between work and the family operate in both time and space. Examination of developments in France over the past century or more shows how change has taken place over time by revealing a succession of different periods (and phases within each period), each one dominated by a particular form of relationship to work and type of family. Periodisation of this kind reveals the time-lags between the process of adaptation in the two spheres (productive and reproductive) and the processes of transition from one model to another. The variation in space relates to two different entities. The first is the social space, at all levels, from the particular (the individual and each social category) to the general (the sector and society as a whole), with the intermediate levels in between (groups, firms, organisations). Each level of the social space (a social category, for example) has particular forms of relationship between work and the family. Finally, by combining the two dimensions of time and space, it becomes possible to observe differences in the forms taken by that relationship at the societal level (i.e. between different societies). In this way, we have been able to compare two or more states (France and the United Kingdom, then Europe) by outlining the configurations that typify each country. This in turn reveals the internal coherence of each system, i.e. the way in which, in each system, the interaction between those elements relating to employment and those involving the family is regulated at the macro-social level.

#### *Epistemological, empirical and theoretical effects*

Let us begin by looking at the question of the boundaries between spheres and disciplines: to investigate the relationship between work and the family is to conceive of individuals, of actors, as functioning in both spheres at one and the same time, i.e. to regard them as part of both spheres at the same time. To recognise this is, therefore, to recognise the need to break down the boundaries between the various approaches in order to recast our theoretical constructs. The fundamental aim here is to abandon the separate approaches that lead only to fragmentation in order to adopt an holistic view of the individual actor. In other words, the reconstruction of the categories of everyday reality (with the individual actor located in a family and in a job) leads to a reconstruction of epistemological categories.

This is bringing us close to the debate being conducted between two schools, one emphasising the freedom of the actor and the other focusing on the influence of structures. Taking the notion of dynamic as a starting point, we have sought rather to show how, in each society, there is a high level of *overall coherence* but, at the same time, evolution, twists and turns and moves between categories. Such moves show how the actor (not only individuals, but also groups or even countries) can shift position, how his or her situation can change (by moving from one category to another, from one sector of the economy to another, or from one type of family to another). At the macrosocial level, this is the preliminary step in an approach to the process of *social change*.

Empirically, there are two elements to be taken into account (Barrère-Maurisson, 1992). Firstly, the assertion that “each job is allocated to an individual with specific

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<sup>2</sup> La division familiale du travail (Barrère-Maurisson, 1992).

family characteristics" indicates not only that there is a correspondence between types of family and types of career but also that, just as employers manage their workforces, so the family is "managed" in some way. This management of the family is in fact the manifestation of the conjunction of employers' and employees' strategies, which in the latter case constitute their aspirations in terms both of the labour market and of family life.

Secondly, the assertion that "there cannot be any economic change without a concomitant change in the family, and vice versa" reflects the correspondence between the dominant family form and the economic characteristics of any given society. This provides the basis for comparison of the various societal forms of the relationship between work and the family, with each form constituting an historical and local specification of the relationship. Thus there is a correspondence between, for example, an "historical" state of the regulatory processes at work in the labour market and a particular configuration of family structures.

On the theoretical level, two redefinitions and one conceptual development are to be noted.

*The definition of work as a combination of two spheres, the world of work and that of the family*, makes it possible to incorporate the family into the notion of work and thus of production. Furthermore, it enables us to make a real comparison of the situation of women at work (and not only in the family) with that of men, who are now regarded as belonging to the sphere of the family and not just to the world of work.

On the other hand, *the definition of the family "as a space in which work is regulated"* allows us to respond to certain theoretical concerns, particularly those relating to the question of family forms and their relationship to economic life. Firstly, it makes it possible to include all forms of family, including modern, reconstituted families, irrespective of ties of kinship or marriage (single-parent families, unmarried people, etc.).

As far as the notion of "family division of labour" itself is concerned, it is well suited to analysis of the dynamic aspect of the relationship between work and the family because it relates to a real social process, namely the "process whereby work is distributed in accordance with family situation". This process was particularly clear in the case of the agricultural family, in other words in situations where there is a blurring of the distinction between work and the family, where indeed *"work is allocated in accordance with status within the family"*.

In this respect, it is true, we are close to Durkheim's notion of the division of labour. Here, however, the process of allocating work within the family is located in both the domestic sphere and the world of work, and at all levels of the social sphere (individuals, organisations, sectors of the economy) and, moreover, in both time and space.

## 1-2 - Methodology: the question of the national/international and micro/macro levels

*From a purely methodological perspective*

The micro method can be chosen in order to analyse the situation in a given society if the aim is to capture the behaviour patterns of individuals or of families, for example. However, there is nothing to prevent the use of a macro approach in order

to shed light on the behaviour of different groups and how that behaviour is evolving in view of the role of particular institutions, for example, or in order to illuminate the structural and cultural context. Either approach can also be used at the *national* level; furthermore, they can be combined.

At the *international* level, i.e. when the objective is international analysis or comparison, a global (i.e. macro) approach, focusing on structural elements, might be considered the best way of gaining insight into the differences between societies. However, it is also possible to adopt a micro perspective in order to focus, for example, on the behaviour of individuals, families or even organisations (Iribarne, 1989).

In fact, the question is being discussed here from a strictly methodological point of view, as if the sole concern were to develop an investigative method and to establish the "level" at which the investigation were to be conducted. However, examination of the underlying theories puts the question in an altogether different light.

#### *From a theoretical point of view*

There is no reason why the investigations, i.e. the micro and macro methodologies, should not be combined, whether at the national or international level. But what is the theoretical framework that enables us to choose one or other of these approaches, or indeed to combine them?

Ultimately, the fundamental question is not that of the choice between micro and macro methodologies. On the contrary, it is perhaps to discover how to effect the transition from the micro to the macro level, or vice versa, from the macro to the micro level. We have already indicated some possible routes which, within the framework of what we have called a "specific theory" (Barrère-Maurisson, 1992 and 1995), make it possible to shift from the micro to the macro, and vice versa. How is this possible, and why does it need to be done? The reason is that it is the same phenomenon, in this case the family division of labour, that is at work at all levels of the social sphere. It is that that makes it possible to move from one level to another. In so doing, we are, in a way, tackling the question of the relationship between the *particularity* and the *generality* of the phenomena observed.

The relations that help the social sphere to function involve actors operating at various levels. These various levels are linked to each other, making it possible to investigate the way in which an individual belonging to such and such a group is positioned within a firm or in the labour market. If the various levels are located in what we call the *social* sphere and the whole constitutes what we call the *societal* sphere, then the shift from the social to the societal arises out of the articulation of these various levels. There is in effect a move away from the different sets of principles underlying each social space towards an overall coherence. It is necessary to examine the way in which the various elements, whose animating principles may be contradictory but which nevertheless contribute to the overall coherence, are put together. Thus the objective is, as it were, to apprehend an outcome, one produced by sometimes contradictory impulses.

Thus the *societal* form of the relationship between work and the family is an expression, at a general level, of what is produced when the various elements that make up the two spheres come together, although it must be stressed that they come together in a variety of way at the various intermediate levels. At any point in time, however, it is possible to move from one of these forms to another, from a *general* to

a *particular* form, and vice versa<sup>3</sup>. They are congruous with each other since they form part of the same overall coherence and contribute to the same mode of regulation. Thus at each level the general is integrated into the specific. Ultimately, it might be said that each individual is revealing of some aspect of social history, and just as social history is nurtured by individual life histories, so the general is “rich in specificity” (Maurice, Sellier and Silvestre, 1982, p. 384). It is in this way that the *societal* form of the relationship between work and the family retranscribes the specificities of the various modes that can be observed in the individual social spaces. In this sense, it contributes to the articulation of the micro and macro levels of analysis.

### 1-3 - The analysis: from the social to the societal

#### *Different units of reference, but the same principle*

In societal comparison, the primary aim is to analyse society as a whole and its overall coherence<sup>4</sup>. Thus the focus of attention is no longer the *social* - whatever the reference level may be - but the *societal*, since it is the whole of society that becomes the unit of reference<sup>5</sup>. Hence, we have adopted here a comparative approach based on the variation in the societal forms of the family division of labour, which leads, ultimately, to a comparative approach to macro-social modes of regulation.

This analysis is governed by two principles, derived from the conceptualisation of society as a global system. The first is that the relationship between work and the family is regarded as an expression of that system and that the purpose of analysis is to illuminate the overall coherence of the system and its mode of regulation. The second is to highlight the singularity of each societal form as an historical and local specification of that relationship, i.e. as existing in a given society and at a given time. It is this that makes it possible to compare different systems.

#### *Societal form and overall mode of regulation*

The societal form of the relationship between work and the family is the manifestation of the articulation of the various social entities to each other; this is, as it were, the “horizontal” component, as opposed to the “vertical” articulation, which relates to the various levels.

In this case, the focus of attention is, for example, the way in which policies relating to work and the family are linked to each other. Thus in any given society, employment and family policies as well as fiscal and social policies (housing, health, care of the elderly etc.) help to produce the conditions in which a particular

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<sup>3</sup> In describing their approach as the “societal effect”, in which the firm is taken as a basis for studying society, Maurice, Sellier, Silvestre (1979) explain that “this research strategy most certainly does not involve extrapolating from analysis of the firm to that of society (or vice versa). On the contrary, it opens up the prospect of integrating the “macro” and “micro” levels of sociological analysis”, (note 59, p.363).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the article “Système” in Boudon, Bourricaud, 1982, p. 555.

<sup>5</sup> We define “societal” as “that which concerns the whole of society” (cf. Parson’s notion of *societal* community); on the polemic surrounding the use of the term, cf. Héran and Tréanton, 1991.

relationship to work and employment develops and certain modes of family life can flourish.

Thus it is through the articulation of these various elements that a sort of model tends to emerge at the level of society as a whole, giving concrete expression to the conjunction of a particular relationship to work and a specific form of family life: this is what we have termed the “societal form of the relationship”. These interactions, and hence the overall coherence and mode of regulation arising out of them, are specific to each society since they are based on a particular social fabric and particular institutions. However, this specificity, which is reflected in the societal form of the relationship, is also due to the fact that it relates to a given society and a given point in time: thus it is a *specification* that is both historical *and* local.

### *The elements of the comparison*

Our efforts are concentrated, therefore, on capturing the national characteristics of the phenomenon. Despite their specificity, those characteristics reveal the general nature of the relationship, i.e. the oneness of its underlying principle.

For each country, a certain number of economic, social and institutional elements have to be taken into account in order to construct the societal comparison of the forms of family division of labour. The most important of these are: 1) the dominant type of *economic* sector (agriculture, manufacturing, market services, non-market or public services); 2) the dominant *family* type (patriarchal, conjugal, single-breadwinner, two-breadwinner); 3 - the male and female mode of participation in *paid work*, and 4) the agency that takes main responsibility for household duties (extended or nuclear family, market or non-market service organisations).

Thus it becomes possible to analyse the *correlation* between the dominant family forms and those of the relationship to work (paid and unpaid). Such analysis reveals the existence of four types of family division of labour that constitute, in any group of developed countries, four different modes of adjustment between the characteristics of the family and those of the economy (Barrère-Maurisson and Marchand, 1990).

In order to identify the processes of *regulation* at work in each country, it is necessary to analyse the role of the institutions and organisations that work to preserve the overall coherence of each national system. In concrete terms, therefore, what is being investigated here is the role played by, and the relationships between, the various societal actors, including families, firms, organisations, the market and the state. The purpose here is to identify the actor that, at the *societal* level, plays a pre-eminent role in linking the two spheres (paid and unpaid, private and public) and, in so doing, to reveal the process of *regulation* at work in each situation. This is the method already used to identify three main modes of regulation, in which the family, firms or the market play the predominant role; we have termed these modes the *familial*, *market* and *political* modes of regulation (Barrère-Maurisson 1995, p. 81, cf. table 1 in appendix).

In France, for example, the *familial* mode of regulation prevailed in the period when the country was predominantly agriculture and the patriarchal family was the basic unit of production. The lack of boundaries between work and the family enabled the family to be a locus of both business and domestic work. The family was the agent of social regulation: as the basic social unit, it reproduced a private order at the level of the wider society. And the structure of authority in the family reflected that in the wider society.



The *market* mode of regulation encompasses two situations in which a liberal mode dominates: the industrial model, in which private enterprise prevails, and the tertiary or service-based model. The former model prevailed in France during the period of industrial paternalism, while the latter predominates today in a country like the United Kingdom. In the first case, the process of industrialisation was based on the conjugal family, in which the man was the principal breadwinner. And it was the firm, impelled by the paternalist doctrine, that managed the family, as it managed work. Later, as the service sector expanded, increasing numbers of women began to join the wage-earning class, often in order to supplement the family income. Thus emerged the family with two unequal breadwinners. In both these cases, regulation takes place through the market, which is where both the relationship to work and responsibility for the domestic sphere are regulated. The relationships between organisations in the labour market are governed by competition and, in the absence of any real family policy, childcare and domestic work are a private matter.

Finally, the *political* mode of regulation is the one that is developing in economies dominated by public services: this is somewhat the case in France or Sweden today. These are societies in which women are well integrated into the labour market and in which families have two breadwinners and domestic work is shared, when it is not entrusted to public agencies. The State is the key actor in the mode of social regulation, which is therefore public in character. The State is an active player in a number of different spheres, including private ones; it manages and codifies both work and the family through a whole range of measures that govern integration and exclusion. Institutions, particularly social ones, have a dominant role. This is the welfare state model.

These modes of societal regulation enable us to locate societies relative to each other in their current “stylised” state. In this respect, the three modes of regulation are sorts of *ideal types*. They are reductive, like any pure model; since reality is more complex, only intermediate or mixed forms actually exist, if only because situations are never fixed but always subject to change. Nevertheless, these three models have the merit of capturing change and highlighting the internal coherence or key concerns of the sets of principles driving the various modes of regulation.

It is this that makes possible societal comparison: analysis of countries provides a starting point for comparing *systems*. In this way, attempts can be made not only to locate countries in relation to each other but also to examine the possible direction of change in the future.

#### *Change of regulatory mode and social change*

The existence of three major modes of regulation, and location of them on the basis of the relationship between work and the family, makes it possible to advance hypotheses as to the direction of future change. Setting to one side changes in the various sectors of the economy and the relationship to employment, our theoretical framework reveals changes affecting family structures and the domestic sphere.

Furthermore, it becomes possible to discern changes in the processes of societal regulation as the private (familial) mode gives way first to a liberal (firm and market-based) mode and then to a public (State) mode.

Even though these changes are not ineluctable in all countries, they reveal a link between the changes in regulatory processes and changes in the wider society.

## 2 - Modes of societal regulation and social change

### *Of the paradigm of societal regulation*

The objective now is to see in what respects the analyses derived from the theoretical framework of the “familial division of labour” can acquire a wider significance. More particularly, we are going to examine the conditions under which the paradigm of *societal regulation* can be transposed or even extended to a wider sphere, in this case social change. Thus taking the results obtained from our analysis of the work-family relationship as a starting point, we are going to make this paradigm of societal regulation operate at a general level; in this sense, we are following the principle applied by others to “social regulation” (Reynaud, 1989 and 1991, p. 20).

The main characteristics exposed by the operation of the family-work relationship - in other words the *complete social phenomenon* represented by the family division of labour (Barrère-Maurisson, 1992) - are in fact a manifestation of the general characteristics of the wider society and its mode of operation. Furthermore, work and the family are nothing other than a representation of the spheres of production and reproduction. Once this is grasped, the pertinence, indeed the richness of an analysis in terms of modes of societal regulation is revealed. In this respect, “the concerns of specialised sociology come close ... to the preoccupations of general sociology”. (F. Chazel, in Chazel, Favereau and Friedberg, 1994, p. 86).

Thus we are going to start by examining the typologies in order to ascertain what they can contribute to the analysis of comparisons and of social change. This is why the question of the generality or, conversely, specificity of the phenomena observed is important. And in the light of the emergence, in a new context, of new modes of *societal regulation*, we will also have to specify some of the principles on which an approach to change and the conditions of change might be based.

### 2-1 The contribution of typologies to the analysis of comparisons and social change

A distinction needs to be made between two sorts of typologies, one of which we will call *concrete* and the other *abstract*<sup>6</sup>.

The first typology (e.g. Barrère-Maurisson and Marchand, 1990, p. 21) is drawn up on the basis of “concrete” data, in this case statistics. To the extent that it constitutes an attempt to provide an exhaustive representation of the phenomenon, it expresses its *generality*. Nevertheless, investigation at the micro level is also required in order to give the classification its full meaning (in other words: *to understand it*), to impart qualitative richness to each situation and to arrange reality in relation to each group. In this respect, it constitutes one methodology in the comparison. And in any case, it reveals states at a given moment in time and not “stylised facts” or models. We will call it: “international” comparison.

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<sup>6</sup> The table 2 “Typologies and the comparison of societies” (cf. appendix) lists the main characteristics of and differences between the two categories of typologies.

In contrast, the abstract typology, (e.g. Barrère-Maurisson, 1995) reveals typical situations which do not necessarily have any systematic, “real-world” counterpart. It is the product, therefore, of a theoretical construct, based on the dominant forms of phenomena as revealed through analysis. This is the meaning of the abstract typology based on “dominant” forms, each representing a different state of the same phenomenon; in reality, of course, a multiplicity of different forms always coexists at any given point in time. As a result, there is no systematic correlation between any one country and a particular model; each country may contain elements of two different models, since reality is always more complex than any single, pure model.

The abstract typology in fact gives expression to the specificity (or specificities) of the phenomenon in question, i.e. its “discontinuity” from one country to another (cf. Maurice, 1989). In other words, the dominant forms of work, the family etc. are located in a specific historical and local context. The abstract typology makes it possible to take the analysis further (in order to *explain* rather than simply understand), since what is being revealed are the principles underlying the structures observed. This is a true “societal” comparison, since it relates to systems and not to countries as the concrete typology does.

In reality, the typologies have to be incorporated into a pre-existing theoretical framework in order that the diversity of phenomena observed can be given a real meaning. Moreover, it must be possible to link them to an explanatory model, a *paradigm*, which is the only means of rendering the principles at work intelligible. The typologies must in fact account not only for the diversity of situations but also, and above all, for the way in which those situations illustrate the process of change.

In other words, it is necessary to retain both the *specific* and the *general*.

## 2-2 The specificity and generality of phenomena

### *Societal forms are historical and local specifications*

Societal comparison, i.e. between social system, is based on the fact that each form of the family division of labour, for example, constitutes a particular specification of the relation that reflects both the social context and history specific to each society. Thus there is both a *temporal* and a *spatial* dimension.

Thus each societal form constitutes “a configuration that is specific to a given country and period of history” (Boyer, 1986). In this sense, a comparative approach is nothing more than analysis of the process of spatial and temporal differentiation.

Each country has its own social groups, categories and decision-making bodies, and therefore a particular set of social relations specific to each national space, and it also has its own history. It is the accumulated weight of that history that forges the current economic and social environment. Thus, for example, the shift away from agriculture took place at different rates and in different ways in France and in Great Britain, which may explain the different position occupied by women’s work in the two countries (Tilly and Scott, 1978). This is why it is necessary to illuminate the process by which each society has developed historically.

Thus it is the combination of all these elements that constitutes the singularity of each state. The specific forms of the relationship to work and of the family for which they serve as a vehicle reveal the way in which, over the course of a country's history, the various levels and decision-making bodies in the social sphere are articulated. Thus the process of articulation, which is itself rooted in the process of constructing a national entity, explains the *specificity* of the *modes of regulation* in each society.

### *The context*

Thus it is necessary to retain both the specific (in each society) and the general. In other words, it is necessary to highlight national specificities, despite the apparent uniqueness of the phenomenon - for some, the wage-employment relationship (*rapport salarial*) (Maurice, Sellier and Silvestre, 1982, p. 10), for us, the family division of labour. This is how we have attempted to reveal the coherence of the phenomenon, despite the apparent specificity, thus creating the basis for generalisation.

This is why it is necessary to specify the context. Since relationships with the external environment are one of the factors that help to shape each of the social spaces, it is essential to define the context of which they are a part. In our view, therefore, the cultural aspect (i.e. the fact of being embedded in a specific context) explains the changing forms of phenomena observed in different places.

Thus it is always necessary to locate phenomena in their local context, which means highlighting the specific local conditions that have helped to shape, in this case, the family division of labour. From this point of view, individual countries are in effect so many localised social spaces, the specific characteristics of which have to be revealed since they help to give phenomena their particular form and to ensure that the societal mode of regulation retains its characteristic coherence.

It is only under these conditions that specificity can be said to contain an element of generality that goes beyond mere contingency (Maurice, 1994). In other words, all systems are local, but their level of generality can be raised by systematic comparison (Friedberg, 1993, p. 21).

### *Conceptualising the supranational*

The supranational European entity may indeed constitute a new context.

It is one thing to observe the development of a European entity, but quite another to conceptualise it. Nevertheless, the two must be conceived of in tandem (Kuhn, 1972, p. 75), since only through a process of conceptualisation can the notion become a tool for the analysis of change.

In earlier studies (Barrère-Maurisson, 1995, p. 83), we advanced the hypothesis that it is through investigation of modes of regulation and their evolution that the various forms of social cohesion, described variously as communalist, associative and administrative, are brought to light. This in turn, we suggested, reflected specific relationships to nationality, namely union, association and delegation, and opened the way for a further phase in which a relationship to *supranationality* would emerge.

*Supranationality* has to be accompanied by a process of conceptualisation, or reconstruction, since it represents a new relationship to the nation state. Quite apart

from the economic, institutional and social effects it will have (and which are an indication of new social practices), the emergence of a supranational entity in Europe raises the question of how to redefine the social actors and social spaces, and the relationships between them (Maurice, 1995). In this respect, the task we face is the sociological one of reconstructing categories of “knowledge”.

In “social” analysis, where the point of reference is a particular society (cf. *infra*), the actors are “marked out”, the highest one in the hierarchy being the State; in societal analysis, on the other hand, society, considered as the nation, becomes an actor in its own right (Abélès, 1996). Government policies in the various European countries, particularly in those in which the State plays a dominant role, have widened considerably in scope in recent years, with the State intervening in a very broad range of areas, including employment, taxation, the family, domestic services etc. At the same time, and partly in consequence, those policies have become more complex, while constituting the basic instruments for regulating the way in which societies operate. However, the regulations and directives issued by the European Commission, for example, have decisively changed the behaviour of the traditional actors at national level (Muller, 1994).

This has undoubtedly led to a reconstitution of the traditional actors in the public sphere (firms, trade unions, even the State, whose role has been redefined) and to the emergence of new groupings. Out of these new groupings have emerged actors operating at different levels, notably the meso level. These are the so-called intermediate actors, operating either at the local level or in different kinds of organisation, such as associations (Smith, 1995). It is also within this framework that the resurgence of domestic or private arrangements in areas previously the responsibility of public or State agencies can be understood.

In other words, what we have become accustomed to call the crisis of the welfare state is part of a wider crisis of the State itself, and can be seen as an indication of a move towards a general reconstitution that will bring into play new spaces and levels, new actors and new relations and create a new form of social cohesion and relationship to nationality. Is it also a harbinger of a new mode of regulation and of social change?

### **3 - Modes of regulation and social change**

Are we witnessing, at least in some countries, particularly European ones, a transition from regulation by the State (i.e. national regulation) to a more complex mode of regulation, which might best be described as “multipartite”, in the sense that it involves not only the traditional actors involved in earlier modes of regulation (the family, the firm, trade unions, the market and the State) but also the new supranational actor?

In what ways, therefore, can the notion of *modes of societal regulation* help us to reach a verdict on these changes?

#### *Modes and processes of regulation*

The general framework for interpreting change on the basis of modes of societal regulation must fulfil certain conditions. In our view, an approach based on modes of

regulation, and therefore on processes of regulation, makes it possible to uphold several principles:

- 1 - the analytical framework can be dynamic, i.e. it can be used to investigate processes and strategies over time rather than in one particular period (a diachronic rather than a synchronic approach);
- 2 - it allows for comparability (and the two essential sub-principles of generality and specificity) and for
- 3 - multidimensionality (i.e. different levels of analysis - micro-meso-macro -, different actors, different referents).

Such analysis in terms of regulatory processes has its roots in genetic structuralism (Piaget, 1968); the so-called “*régulation*” school of macro-economic theory is based on some of its principles (Boyer, 1986). In this approach, the term “regulation” denotes the ways in which the economic system reproduces itself, and the “mode of regulation” denotes the series of historical (particularly institutional) procedures through which that reproduction is achieved.

For our part, we have sought to highlight the *modes of regulation* that have dominated in particular historical periods, or in separate states, by investigating the matching of dominant family forms with a particular relationship to paid work.

### *Transitions and change*

While a change of mode of regulation is an indication of social change, that change does not of course follow a uniform path. In other words, each society has its own characteristics and history and therefore develops in its own particular way. Thus, on the one hand, there are different timetables of change and, on the other, possible feedback effects (Piaget, 1968, p. 88, speaks of imprecise retrospective and anticipatory effects similar to feedback).

This is perhaps the key that opens up the way to an understanding of the changes recently undergone by certain Eastern European countries. These countries have experienced a thoroughgoing industrial restructuring and radical changes in the cultural and family spheres in conjunction with the collapse of centrally controlled regimes. However, the primacy often given to economic factors in the analysis of change has led to the belief that these countries are “retreating into the past”, as if they were rediscovering the “market”. On the contrary: the principal characteristic of these countries was not their economic system (dominated by manufacturing industry) but their mode of regulation, mediated as it was through the State; in this sense, they were close to the *political* mode of regulation already outlined above (dual-breadwinner families, public services etc.). Thus these changes can be interpreted as an indication of a shift in the *mode of regulation*, and in particular of a transition from a State-based to a market-based mode; this in turn accounts for the current characteristics of these countries, including the “retreat” towards the conjugal family, etc. These characteristics also provide a clear illustration of one of the principles of The family division of labour, which is that there cannot be any economic change without a concomitant change in the family, and vice versa.

In other words, it is the *mode of regulation* that characterises a society, not its economic or other structures, even though they, along with other elements, such as social change, help to shape it.

### **Societal comparison and modes of regulation**

So in what sense does this approach constitute a “revisiting” of societal analysis, and why does it provide a basis for extending the scope of the analysis to encompass social change? A number of factors can be mentioned.

Firstly, with regard to the early stages of the development of societal analysis, it has to be observed that, in order to extend the scope of the analysis, it had to be “opened up” and applied to areas other than those in which it had its origins (the firm, manufacturing industry, the labour market, skills). Our contribution was to extend the analysis to the non-market service sector (public services) (Barrère-Maurisson and Robert, 1994).

Furthermore, the notion of dynamic had to be introduced through the development of a diachronic rather than synchronic approach. This was the only way of gaining insight into mechanisms of development and transformation, particularly in the field of comparative development. It is here that the approaches of the “regulationist” economists can be put to good use, since they bring history and conflict into the equation.

However, over and above the emphasis on institutions that is a particular characteristic of this school, account also had to be taken of the various levels. To that end, it was necessary to articulate actors and institutions, particularly since the national and supranational context was changing. From this point onwards, it became impossible to avoid these issues.

Finally, societal analysis had to be globalised, not only from a multi-disciplinary point of view but also through the incorporation of two further spheres: production and reproduction.

And since our societies are going through a period of fundamental change and restructuring, these approaches have to be extended in order to make these new circumstances intelligible. Our aim, therefore, is to contribute to the extension of societal analysis by developing the paradigm of *modes of regulation*. In this way, societal analysis becomes more generally applicable and can be extended to encompass social change.

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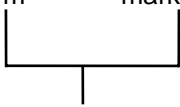
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## APPENDIX

Table 1

**WORK - FAMILY AND MODES OF SOCIETAL REGULATION**

Source: M.A. BARRERE-MAURISSON, 1995, p. 81  
(amended version of the original table)

Variable						Trend
<i>economic sector</i>	agriculture	industry	market services	public services		<i>tertiarisation</i>
<i>work</i>	family	men industry	women market services	women public services		<i>individualisation</i>
<i>type of family</i>	patriarchal family	conjugal family	1 main bread- winner family	2 breadwinner family		<i>break-up</i>
<i>domestic work</i>	extended family	nuclear family	market services	collective services		<i>externalisation</i>
<i>division of work</i>	self- regulation	no sharing	unequal sharing	equal sharing		<i>greater equality</i>
<i>regulatory agent</i>	family	firm	market	State		<i>socialisation</i>
						
<i>mode of regulation</i>	familial	market		political		<i>family to</i> → <i>politics</i>
<i>social order</i>	private order	liberal order		public order		<i>private to</i> → <i>public</i>

**Table 2**  
**TYPOLOGIES AND COMPARISON OF SOCIETIES**

concrete typology	abstract typology
figurative - descriptive	constructed
average values-variables	dominant forms, pre-eminent actor
statistical map - positions	different states
country	principles
generality	specificities
understand	explain
methodology	theory
hybrid models	pure models
a state at a given moment	ideal types
<i>international comparison</i>	<i>societal comparison</i>